

Exeter Fire District

(June 29, 2006)

Approved 08/17

Call to Order

Chairman Peter Lacouture called the June meeting of the Exeter Fire District to order at 7:10pm. Present were Commissioners Vergano, Lacouture, Wilbur, Nievera, Swanson, and Walker. There were 7 members of the public in attendance.

Public Comment

Dan Patterson (South County Tr.) asked why some of the suggestions he had offered earlier in the year had yet to be addressed. Mr. Lacouture explained that several of the recommendations needed to be addressed at a “meeting of the members”, not a board of commissioner’s meeting, as this was. Several of the recommendations are being verbalized for inclusion to the agenda for the next annual meeting. Mr. Lacouture offered that “these meetings are expensive to hold and unless it is for a very serious reason, we will not incur that expense.” Mr. Patterson then inquired of the bidding rules that were suggested at the last meeting. Ms. Vergano informed Mr. Patterson that, as discussed last month, we have no control over the individual organizations, thus we are not able to place restrictions or controls on them. She suggested that Mr. Patterson contact the individual organizations to discuss this subject

with them. He then commented on the inadequate posting that is being done to notify the public of the monthly meetings. Mr. Nievera informed Mr. Patterson that he personally sees to the postings and that each meeting is posted on the Secretary of State's web site at least 48 hours prior to the meeting, as required by RI state law, and that each meeting agenda is posted in at least five locations around town. Ms. McMahon added that notice of the meetings is also placed on the voice mail announcement at the tax office. Mr. Patterson stated that tonight's meeting agenda was not on the Secretary of State's web site. Mr. Nievera produced written confirmation from the open meetings administration that the meeting was in fact posted within the 48-hour limit.

Joe Conroy (Stony Ln.) asked of the collection shortfall and is encouraging the district to establish a reserve fund noting that a cash reserve may be necessary to address shortfalls in future years. Mr. Lacouture responded that the reserve fund is a budgetary issue and will be dealt with during the next budget cycle.

Election of Officers

Without objection, Mr. Lacouture moved item 8(a), Treasurer – interview and selection, to this location on the agenda to enable the election of officers to be completed at this time.

Mr. Lacouture explained the process by which the position of treasurer had been advertised. He then read the letter of interest from the only candidate, Margaret Caito. After several questions

concerning her qualifications were answered, Ms. Caito agreed to accept the volunteer position as treasurer. Mr. Walker moved (Mr. Nievera second) the appointment of Ms. Caito as district treasurer. The motion carried unanimously. While Ms. Caito will maintain a portion of her records at the tax office, she desires to perform the majority of her work from home. Mr. Nievera stated that his intent is to recommend the purchase of a lap top computer, for use by the treasurer, if and when the legislative grant, applied for earlier in the year, is approved. There was no objection to Ms. Caito completing the bulk of her duties from her home. Ms. Vergano will co-ordinate the transfer of authority from herself to Ms. Caito within the next two weeks. Ms. Caito will be an active participant in the preparation and finalization of the '06 tax bills to be mailed in July. Ms. Vergano has discussed the position and its responsibilities with Ms. Caito and feels that she (Ms. Caito) has a thorough understanding of the position and the ability to act as treasurer for the Exeter Fire District.

Mr. Walker nominated (Mr. Nievera second) Mr. Lacouture for the office of Chairman. The affirmative vote was unanimous.

Mr. Walker nominated (Mr. Nievera second) Mr. Wilbur for the office of Vice-Chairman. The affirmative vote was unanimous.

Ms. Vergano nominated (Mr. Wilbur second) Mr. Nievera for the office of Clerk. The affirmative vote was unanimous.

Previous Month's Minutes

Mr. Wilbur moved (Ms. Vergano second) acceptance of the minutes of the May meeting. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Wilbur

moved (Ms. Vergano second) acceptance of the minutes of the May executive session. That motion was also unanimous in its acceptance.

Treasurer's Report

Ms. Vergano reports the beginning balance of \$94,824.16 plus cleared transactions of \$66,476.46 (\$1,126.58 in checks and payments and \$67,603.04 in deposits and credits) leave a cleared balance of \$161,300.62, as of June 09. These figures agree with the monthly statement from Citizens Bank. Mr. Nievera has reviewed the reconciliation summary and is satisfied with its accuracy. The uncleared register balance, including \$1,304.15 in uncleared transactions, is \$159,996.47 as of June 09. Mr. Nievera moved (Mr. Wilbur second) acceptance of the treasurer's report. The motion carried unanimously.

Communications

Mr. Nievera reports having received an announcement from VFIS announcing a training session in July. He has also received the annual survey of fire districts from the state. Both of these have been given to Mr. Lacouture for his action. An invoice (\$100) for the recent computer repair has been received and given to Ms. Vergano for her immediate action. Mr. Nievera read the draft of a letter reserving the high school auditorium for the 2007 annual meeting. It was agreed to forward the request to the EWG superintendent.

Old Business

Ms. Vergano questioned the difference in the stenographer's fees for the last two annual meetings. Mr. Lacouture responded that the fees charged are on a per page basis, not a flat or hourly fee.

Ms. Vergano reported that the district had collected 94.3% of the amount billed. She then produced and explained a spreadsheet indicating how the shortfall would be allocated among the individual organizations. She also explained that the administrative function of the district did not share in the shortfall because of its necessity to continue to operate. Mr. Nievera was in total agreement with this action. Ms. Vergano noted that the budget calculation error of \$2,505 in the 05/06 dispatch corp. budget should be deducted, with Mr. Morgan's approval, from their Q4 payment. After a very short discussion on the manner in which the shortfall would be addressed (utilizing Q1/FY06 receipts) Mr. Walker moved (Mr. Nievera second) sending the shortfall amount for FY05 to the organizations as soon as possible. This would most likely be within the first week of the first collection period of Q1/FY06. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Nievera reported that there were 246 delinquent accounts (this represents \$48,077.27 in uncollected tax revenue) - 162 with no activity, whatsoever. Mr. Nievera stated that it would be necessary to formulate a policy on the course of action to be taken by the district with regard to delinquent accounts in the very near future. Mr. Swanson inquired as to the manner in which the town treats

delinquent accounts. Ms. McMahon stated that the town would usually take action after two years of no contact by the taxpayer. Ms. Vergano cited the expense incurred notifying taxpayers of a possible tax sale. Several commissioners raised the possibility of notifying the taxpayers, owing the larger amounts, of a potential tax sale while carrying the remainder indefinitely. There followed a short discussion on the legality of selective notification. This will be discussed further at the next regular meeting of the board. Mr. Lacouture inquired, perhaps the posting of a list of delinquent taxpayers? Mr. Nievera suggested writing off several of the smaller accounts to lessen the number with which we would then be dealing.

Mr. Lacouture stated that we must have a starting date for Ms. Caito. Ms. Vergano will work with Ms. Caito and attempt to have the transfer completed by July 05.

There was nothing further to report on the Grant or Capital expenditures – planning committees.

Mr. Wilbur spoke with Mr. Preston concerning the obstacles for the insurance consolidation. Mr. Preston feels that enough precedent has been set to allow the process to proceed. Any questions could be addressed within the insurance committee. He also feels that the savings to the district would be approximately \$7,500 annually. Mr. Nievera questioned whether or not the issues raised by Chief Franklin were addressed. Mr. Wilbur stated that the insurable interest had been addressed. Mr. Lacouture suggested that Mr. Wilbur coordinate the creation of the previously discussed insurance committee. Mr. Wilbur agreed to do so.

There was nothing further to report on the issue of either the budget cap or the ISO rating improvement plan.

Ms. Vergano and Mr. Walker noted that the individual organizations must set their own guidelines and follow their rules for purchasing. As reported earlier the reserve fund is a budgetary issue and will be dealt with during the next budget cycle.

Mr. Nievera introduced a new policy statement for the collector's office dealing with the issue of overpayment of taxes. The statement directs the district tax collector to return those overpayments greater than \$5.00 and retain those under \$5.01. Overpayments that are retained will be treated as "tax revenue". Mr. Wilbur moved (Ms. Vergano second) the adoption of this policy statement. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Nievera will place this statement in the tax office early next week.

New Business

Ms. Vergano informed the board that she had not heard from Opal Data with the new information that would allow a new rate to be set. There was some confusion over the rate that was announced in the Standard Times earlier that day. We expect to hear from Opal early next week with the final figures and will then be able to set a tax rate for the '06 FY. She also reports that the desired changes have been made to the 2006 bill. Those changes include bolding of the address of the tax collector, verbiage indicating the forwarding responsibility for escrow accounts and language stating that any payments

received will first be applied to past due balances. Mr. Wilbur moved (Mr. Walker second) a sub committee of three board members to meet for the purpose of setting the tax rate in accordance with Art. 6, sect. 8, of the bylaws. The motion carried unanimously. The three members will be Ms. Vergano, Mr. Lacouture and Mr. Nievera.

Ms. McMahon has requested non-compensated time off on Wednesday, July 05. The time was granted. Ms McMahon will place an announcement on the office tape stating the office will be closed that day. She also informed the board that Ms. Lussier, the town tax collector, would like to attend a meeting on the 1st and 2nd of November, thus necessitating Ms. McMahon's presence at the town hall. A short discussion did yield the result that it was not in the best interest of the fire district to close the office during a tax collection period, but it was noted that Ms. Lussier has been a very valuable resource to us during our first year. It was decided to ask for commissioners to volunteer time to man the fire district tax office on those two days. Mr. Nievera stated that he would volunteer for one of the days. It is requested that any commissioner interested in volunteering their time indicate so by the next business meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Exeter Fire District will be held on August 17th, 2006 at Station #1. The meeting will start at 7:00pm.

Adjournment

Mr. Walker moved (Mr. Nievera second) adjournment at 9:00pm. The motion carried unanimously.

**Respectfully submitted,
Bill Nievera, Clerk
Exeter Fire District**